

The Town of Norwood, which was officially formed in 1872, was until that time part of Dedham, known as the "mother of towns," as fourteen of the present communities of eastern Massachusetts lay within its original borders. Long used as a hunting ground by Indians, Norwood was first settled by Ezra Morse in 1678. He set up a sawmill in what is now South Norwood, The part of town to which the first concentration of families, almost all of whom were farmers, migrated over the next half-century.

Living in the part of town most distant from Dedham, these settlers soon began to pester town officials for their own parish church in order to minimize the arduous travel over miserable roads of the day which regular attendance at religious services made necessary. Although those in power in Dedham initially resisted the entreaties of the fellow townspeople in the southern part of town, they finally relented in 1730, authorizing the creation of the South Parish.

Ironically, the building of the new parish church, which might well have been expected to unify the fledging community, served ultimately, as a divisive force. While the initial services alternated between the Ellis Tavern and the home of Nathaniel Guild, a dispute over the location of the church led to the building of two structures, one at Clapboard Tree (now part of Westwood) and one in the Nahatan/Prospect Street area. A short time later the Clapboard Tree worshippers were granted their own parish designation (West Dedham), and the South Dedham Parish, its religious links with its neighbors to the west now severed, proceeded to construct a new church in what is presently downtown Norwood near the intersection of Washington and Walpole Streets.

It was at this time that the name "Tiot" began to appear in the written record of the town. Commonly rendered as "land surrounded by water," the term, which is probably of Indian origin, refers to the fact that the town is surrounded by water on three sides by streams and a river.

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Two generations later, the approaching conflict with Britain that was to result in independence for the American colonies produced the event which, more than any other, defines Norwood historically in the minds of its citizens. Captain Aaron Guild, who had served Britain earlier in its war against the French and Indians, was ploughing his fields on the morning of 19 April 1775. Upon hearing of the clash that had occurred in Lexington earlier that day Captain Guild "left plough in furrow and oxen standing ..." and hastened to the site of the

conflict, arriving in time to participate in the final stages of the battle. This legendary act is commemorated on the town seal.

Throughout the war that began with Captain Guild's trek to Lexington, the citizens of South Dedham gave virtually total support to the revolutionary effort. This adherence to the civil authorities in the area was demonstrated in a remarkable manner a dozen years later, in 1787.

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At that time Daniel Shays led the farmers of western Massachusetts in a revolt against the state's government and its Boston banker friends whose insistence upon the payment of debt in scarce coin rather than in the plentiful but virtually worthless paper currency of the day causing them to lose their heavily-mortgaged farms. South Dedham, at that time an overwhelmingly agricultural community, might well have supported its fellow farmers to the west; however, the strong civic ties to Boston which, as part of Dedham, the South Parish maintained apparently predominated, for there is no record of any support in the area for Shays. Indeed, several citizens from the village joined the militia which put down the rebellion.

The early decades of the Nineteenth Century saw the slow transformation of South Dedham from an almost exclusively farming community to a mixed agricultural/industrial economy. The establishment of stage coach service between Boston and Providence over a road that passed through South Dedham shortly prior to the Revolutionary War was greatly advantageous to commercial activity, and the opening of the Norfolk and Bristol Turnpike in 1806, coinciding as it did with the spread of the industrial revolution through the area, provided as even greater impetus. The run of Washington Street from South Norwood to South Walpole, mile after mile of straight roadway, testifies to the vast changes which the industrial era was making in the landscape.

Change at even a greater pace instituted by the completion of the first through railroad line in 1849. In the fifteen years that immediately followed, South Dedham added more population than had settled in the entire period between the arrival of Erza Morse in 1678 and the institution of railroad service. Established or enlarged in this period of rapid economic expansion were a furniture factory, an ink mill, a tannery, and a foundry. The basis was thus for a population explosion which would augment the predominantly Anglo-Saxon Protestant stock of the day with people from a wide variety of nations who followed religious faith different from the one to which South Dedham had been long accustomed.

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The increased population density and commercial activity, together with the substantial distance between South Dedham and Dedham Center, inevitably intensified the separatist sentiments that had previously produced at least two proposals that South Dedham become independent, one in 1730 and another in 1817. One petty dispute followed another, testifying to the increasing animosity between the residents of the two parts of the town, until Dedham's refusal in 1870 to build a separate high school in South Dedham resulted in an 1871 petition to the Massachusetts legislature asking that a new town be created. The act of incorporation was signed into law in 1872. The Town of Norwood, made up mostly of land taken from Dedham, except for a small portion ceded by Walpole, had come into being.

The reason that Norwood was among the list of names considered for the new town is not known. After rejecting such possibilities as Balch, Cedarville, and Queertown, the townsfolk narrowed the choices to Ames and Norwood. As Ames was the name of a prominent Dedham politician of the Federalist era, lingering rivalries ultimately led to the selection of Norwood.

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Norwood's municipal life began with its first town meeting, held on 11 March 1872. After electing town officers, the meeting adopted a resolution thanking the citizens of Dedham and Walpole for their assistance in the formation of Norwood. The initial appropriation for schools was \$6,500, with total taxed collection in 1873 falling just short of \$19,000. The fact that the owners of 340 dwellings possessed a total of only 358 cows clearly indicates the continued shift from an agricultural economy.

During the final three decades of the Nineteenth Century, Norwood experienced vigorous industrial expansion. Railroad maintenance and repair shops located in the town, Bird & Sons opened a roofing plant on Pleasant Street, and the foundations were laid for the printing industry which was to fuel a large part of Norwood's financial strength through the first three-quarters of the Twentieth Century.

The new century opened with the decision to create a municipal electric light plant, one of the very few in the commonwealth, which was completed in 1907. Two years later the man who was probably Norwood's most public-spirited citizen, George F. Willett turned his attention from the Winslow Brothers and Smith tannery which he had helped to found, to civic affairs. Starting as a chair of a tax rate committee, he soon became involved in the Civic Association and purchased Dr. Norton's private hospital, which eventually formed the basis of the Norwood Hospital. To

these two community facilities Mr. Willett donated more than a half a million dollars. At the same time, increased production by the tannery and the Bird plant drew many immigrants from countries that had previously been only scantily represented in Norwood's population. Scandinavia and the Mediterranean provided large numbers, with Syrians in the lead, until World War 1 temporarily slowed immigration. The three-deckers of South Norwood date from this period, as the need for housing outstripped dwellings that predominated near the town center and in the areas adjacent to Westwood and Dedham.

The years immediately prior to World War 1 saw the construction of St. Catherine's Roman Catholic Church and the acquisition by the town from George Willett of the land which was later to become the town common. Most residents are unaware that Willett Pond is not a natural feature of the landscape but a man-made body of water created in 1912 as a water supply for Willett's Winslow Brothers and Smith tannery.

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The development from this era that has unquestionably had the most lasting and beneficial effect upon municipal life in Norwood was, however, the establishment of the town manager form of government. Brainchild of George Willett, it was proposed in 1911 and authorized by the Massachusetts legislature in 1914. Implemented in 1915. It gave to the first town manager, Clearance A. Brigham, administrative control of all town departments which the selectmen had previously overseen. This shifting of control from popularly-elected officials to an appointed professional was at that time unprecedented in New England and had been equaled since that era only by the Education Reform Act of 1993, which effected a similar shift from school committee to superintendent and principals.

World War 1 saw over six hundred men from Norwood serving in the military, and workers on the home front selling Liberty Bonds, making surgical dressings, knitting sweaters, and working for the Red Cross. In the short period of two months (10 August - 11 November 1918) over a dozen men from Norwood lost their lives in the war. A far more serious threat, however, was the widespread influenza epidemic which struck Norwood between September 1918 and January 1919. The Civic Association Building was pressed into service as a emergency hospital; and schools, churches, and theaters were closed in an attempt to limit the scope of the disaster, which produced over sixteen hundred and resulted in the deaths of over ninety Norwood residents. At that time the new junior-senior high school, now the Guild Medical Building, was finally ready for use; the citizens who inspected the new facility little suspected that an explosion

in secondary-age school population would require an addition in 1921 and a separate new structure the "school on the hill" on Nichols Street, a mere five years after that!

Just as Norwood had been unable to escape the influenza epidemic that had stricken the entire nation, so it also, fell prey to the political and labor turmoil of the early years of the Jazz Age, with ten Norwood men arrested in early 1920 during the Red Scare and a 1921 strike by employees of the Plimpton Press to protest the wage reductions that were an inevitable but unfortunate hallmark of the immediate postwar era, as the labor shortages brought about by the war disappeared.

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The 1920's saw the residential development of Westover area on the Westwood/Walpole line, presided over by George Willett. Simultaneously, the town center saw the erection of three buildings which citizens use extensively to this day. St. Catherine's Parish opened an elementary school in 1926, while the town hall, formally known as the Norwood Memorial Municipal Building, was dedicated in 1928, its 170 foot tower soaring over the center of town. Two years later the state armory was opened a few hundred feet down Nahatan Street, a structure that was ultimately to serve as the new Civic Center after the old Civic Association building had been razed to allow for the construction in the early 1980's of a new wing for Norwood Hospital. In 1928 Norwood resident Frank G. Allen was elected governor of Massachusetts, after having risen through the ranks of government as assessor, selectmen, chairman of the draft board, representative, senator, and lieutenant governor. In the world of business, he had advanced to the presidency of the Winslow Brothers and Smith tannery. Running for re-election in 1930, he fell victim to the weakening Depression economy.

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The year that opened the decade of the Depression also saw the virtual destruction of the Civic Association building (later re-built), as well as the opening of the municipal airport. Two years later, in 1932, Wiggins Airways provided a solid financial footing for the new enterprise when it signed a twenty-year at the facility. The Norwood stretch of Providence Highway (U.S. Route 1) was completed in 1934, providing a new strip of land available for commercial development to the south of and roughly parallel to Washington Street. The second half of the decade was marked by another strike at the Winslow Brothers and Smith tannery and over two hundred thousand dollars in damage caused by the 1938 hurricane.

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In 1940 voters approved the construction of the Henry O. Peabody School for Girls, attached to the north end of the high school, and citizens began to prepare for the war that was obviously coming. The initial draft registration, held in October, signed up almost eighteen hundred men; and the first draft draftees, chosen by lottery, left for training the next month. Paper and gasoline were rationed the following year, and an air-alert facility was located in the clock tower of the high school shortly before America entered the war, which had been ongoing in Europe for more than two years. In 1942 Bendix Marine built a new factory on Route 1, and Factory Mutual set up a research division in the same area. That year the town authorized an expansion of the Norwood Airport, which was closed to civilian air traffic from August 1942 to September 1944. 1943 saw short supplies of fuel oil, resulting to some conversion to coal, as well as meat rationing in the town. By 1944 the end of the war was clearly insight, as evidenced by the establishment of the Advisory Committee on the Rehabilitation and Re-employment of Veterans. By the time the war ended during the summer of 1945, over two thousand Norwood citizens had worn their country's colors, and seventy had died in the cause of freedom. Figures compiled that year showed the population, which had declined slightly during the depression, had resumed its upward march, with school population showing its first increase in twenty-five years.

The growth in population, which was to nearly double in size over the next quarter-century, caused a boom in the construction of single family residences. As land for this purpose became more expensive, the focus shifted to apartments, which now constitute a significant portion of the town's housing stock. In addition, during the late forties a million-dollar housing project for veterans was constructed. On the labor front, the experience of the era immediately following World War I was repeated, with frequent strikes reducing worker income and company profits. It was at this period that the often painful adjustment from heavy industry to light manufacturing began. Bendix Aviation closed in 1945; and the long-time Norwood firm, Winslow Brothers and Smith, closed one of its facilities after a 1949 strike. Although these job losses were partially made up by firms which located in Norwood or expanded existing facilities, this process did not develop with great strength until the fifties, and unemployment remained a serious problem through the remaining years of the forties. Another significant change in municipal government occurred in 1947 when the town moved from the traditional open town meeting format, with every registered voter eligible to attend and vote on the articles in the warrant, to the present system of electing a limited number of town meeting members by district.

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The 1950's were a period of outstanding growth, only partially offset by the departure from the scene of some venerable Norwood Businesses. The population increased by fifty percent during the decade, while the number of commercial enterprises more than doubled. The Winslow Brothers and Smith tannery finally ceased operation, as did the Norwood Press, but the arrival of such major firms as Northrop, Mason-Neilan, and Raytheon more than made up for the jobs

lost in the closing of the old-line industries. The home offices of Factory Mutual Engineering Division were located at a Providence Highway site, and the same area of Route 1 began to see the proliferation of the automobile dealerships now widely known as "Automile." With veterans' housing built and occupied by the beginning of the decade, its close saw the construction of Norwood's first municipally-sponsored housing for the elderly.

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During the 1960's Polaroid added significantly to the manufacturing capacity of the town when it constructed a camera factory on the old Forbes estate on Route 1A near Islington, a facility that provides substantial employment to the community and surrounding towns to this day. On the same side of the town the Norwood Research and Industrial Park opened, providing well over one hundred acres of prime industrial land for development. Norwood Hospital opened the first of two additions, one in the early sixties, which virtually doubled its capacity, the second in the early eighties on land ceded by the Civic Association. The town's decision to close a portion of Lenox Street allowed the Plimpton Press to expand its capacity for the production of books. On the western side of town, on the Walpole/Westwood line, the town's fourth Roman Catholic church, Saint Timothy's, opened on the shores of Willett Pond.

Mid-decade saw the completion of Route 95 on the extreme southern edge of town, providing a third route parallel to Routes 1 and 1A with access to the center of town by way of Nahatan Street. On the residential front, Windsor Gardens, sited on the Walpole border between 1A and the Franklin-to-Boston commuter rail line, provided approximately one thousand units of housing in an attractively landscaped setting with the substantial advantage of a commuter rail station on the property. As more and more Norwood residents have worked out of town, many in Boston, the economic ups and downs of local industry have had a less immediate effect on the town's economy; however, lay-offs and plants closings in distant towns, a matter of little local interest in the Nineteenth Century, when virtually all workers lived within walking distance of the factories in which they worked, now send their consequences over the miles of rail and superhighway to Norwood.

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The Town of Norwood first 100 years were celebrated with a variety of activities during 1972. Under the chairmanship of A. Franklin Swift, the Centennial Committee presided over an interfaith religious service and a Centennial Banquet in February, the dedication of Aaron Guild Park across from the Post Office in June, the Centennial Parade on July 4<sup>th</sup>, and a year-long series of carillon concerts, musical extravaganzas, historical exhibitions, and sporting events.

At the closing ceremonies in November, a Centennial Marker was unveiled on the Town Common in Norwood Center. The inscription on the marker read:

### **TOWN OF NORWOOD**

**1872-1972**

**DEDICATED TO ALL HER CITIZENS,  
THOSE OF THE PAST WHOSE IMAGINATION,  
DILIGENCE, AND HARD WORK LAID THE  
FOUNDATION FOR HER EARLY HERITAGE,  
THOSE OF THE PRESENT WHO TODAY PAY  
TRIBUTE ON HER 100<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY, AND  
THOSE OF THE FUTURE WHO WILL BE  
CALLED UPON TO MAINTAIN HER TRADITION.  
NOVEMBER 19, 1972**

In the two decades following the Centennial celebration, the center of town was renovated and beautified, with a repaving of the streets and the installing of new sidewalks from Howard Street to Guild Square. Nowhere were these changes more obvious than on the Town Common, which is more properly known as Veterans of Foreign Wars Square. In 1991, a monument to the "Protectors of the American Way," the gift of local businessman Frank Simoni, was dedicated on the corner near Washington and Nahatan Street. Two years later, a bandstand was erected in the center of the Common and dedicated in memory of Walter J. Dempsey, who had served on the Board of Selectmen for 36 years.

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The decades of the seventies and eighties saw other changes along the main street as businesses came and went with the fluctuations of the economy. Also affecting the business climate in the center of town was the explosion of large shopping malls in the surrounding area and even mini-malls along Route 1 in Norwood. The era of doing of one's shopping in downtown stores has passed by, and many stores found themselves struggling for survival.

There was a slight decline in the overall population of the town in those two decades, and a significant decline in the number of school-age children. The latter factor led to the closing of the Shattuck, Winslow, Guild and Willett elementary schools, as well as the closing of Junior High North on Prospect Street. The population trend also led to the moving the sixth grade from the elementary schools to the Junior High on Washington Street in South Norwood, and the ninth grade from the Junior High to the High School.

The former school buildings did not remain idle, however. They were soon converted to such



uses as senior citizen housing, professional and medical offices, and school administration.

While the overall population went down by a few thousand, there was an increase in new housing construction. These housing units consisted of apartment complexes, new and converted condominiums in various parts of town, and single-family subdivision primarily on the perimeter of the town. During the period of 1972 to 1993, the assessed valuation of property in Norwood increased nearly ten times - from \$287 million to \$2.2 billion. The tax rate for a single-family properties went down over that span of time from \$38 per thousand to \$11.56 per thousand.

The strong religious traditions of Norwood were reaffirmed in recent years with the celebrations of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of St. Timothy's Church in 1988, the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of St. Catherine's Church in 1990, and the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of St. Peter's Church in 1993.

Over the years, many religions have assembled in worship in Norwood. Among them, Temple Shaare Tefilah was established for those in the community who would live a Jewish life.

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Norwood has always been a community with a multitude of activities for its youth. In addition to the extracurricular baseball, softball, football, and hockey programs long in place in this town, there are now extensive youth soccer and basketball programs as well. Many of these activities take place on fields that have been constructed or renovated in recent years through the hard work of many volunteers and cooperation of the town. The indoor sports that once took place at the Civic on Washington Street (where the Norwood Hospital is now) were moved along with the Civic to the former Norwood Armory on Nahatan Street.

Another significant change in the community over the first two decades of its second century was the expansion of the communication media. The former Norwood Messenger was supplanted by the Daily Transcript, a regional newspaper, and the weekly Norwood Times was joined in 1992 by the weekly Norwood Bulletin. In Addition to having three newspapers, the town also has a local cable television station, which brings many local events, including Town Meetings and the meetings of various town boards, into the homes of the citizens.